

Spring Cleaning: “What do I do with those bird nests?”

It’s that time of year again: time to clean off your houseboat, boathouse, balcony, gazebo, gutters or other structures. Every year, you come across the *same* problem which is *just* small enough that you don’t really think about it until the next year when you start your spring cleaning process and the problem pops up again. The cycle can stop with the information here!

The scenario may look something like this: You plan to spend a relaxing day on your houseboat or balcony because the weather is fantastic. You pack a book, sunglasses, your iPod and towel, grab a pitcher of lemonade and head to your peaceful spot to enjoy the day. But once you get there, you notice it is covered with dirt! You may hesitate a moment wondering how dirt made its way to your peaceful spot as it isn’t close to any sources of dirt nearby. When you can’t immediately solve the mystery, you give up and begin cleaning the mess, trying to hurry so you can start relaxing. Then you spot the source of the dirt: a bird nest. The small and humble structure seems harmless enough but begs one question:

“What in the heck do I do with bird nests that are inconveniently situated:

- On the wall RIGHT above my door;
- In the tree RIGHT above my favorite porch chair;
- Under the ledge RIGHT where I dock my boat;
- On the balcony RIGHT above my barbeque;
- Lining the eaves of my condominium;
- Or
- Lining the eaves of the school where I teach?”



Photo by Cindy Gray, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The answer is: It depends on the status of the nest.

- **If NO birds currently live in the nest and there are NO eggs in the nest, you can knock it down.** But be sure this is the case! If there are eggs or baby birds in the nest, knocking it down could be a [violation of federal law](#) with [penalties](#) amounting up to \$15,000 in fines and imprisonment for up to six months.
 - **This may not apply to you IF:** the nest you encounter is an eagle nest. You may not destroy or move an eagle nest at *anytime* pursuant to the [Bald and Golden Eagle](#)

[Protection Act](#). Penalties for violating this act could amount up to a \$100,000 fine and imprisonment for up to a year.

- **If young birds (that haven't learned to fly yet) are occupying the nest and/or you see eggs in the nest, you must leave the nest alone until the birds vacate the nest.** "Vacate" does not mean the birds have left to find lunch or you haze them to the point they jump out. It means adult birds have raised their young ones, taught them to fly and are abandoning the nest at the season's end. A practical way to determine this would be to leave the nest alone for a few days once you suspect the birds have abandoned the nest and monitor it. If the birds come back, give them more time. If they don't come back after a few days, they likely have abandoned the nest.
 - **This may not apply to you IF:** The birds inhabiting the nest are of a non-native or unprotected species such as European Starlings, House Sparrows or Common Pigeons (also called Rock Doves or Rock Pigeons). Click [here](#) for a list of protected birds.
 - **This may not apply to you IF:** You qualify for a special purpose permit. Click [here](#) for details.
- **Be aware** that state laws may impose additional requirements beyond those detailed above. Prior to taking action to remove a nest, check with your state's fish and game office. Click [here](#) to check for related rules pertaining to your state.
- **What to do in the future:**
 - Put up screen or net mesh in the places the birds previously built their nests so they are unable to use those locations again. This will save you the hassle of dealing with the nests. It will also save the birds precious time and energy building a nest which will ultimately get knocked down. Everyone wins.
 - **CAUTION!** Take care to ensure the screens or nets don't become traps! If you install a screen or net incorrectly, it could become a trap for the birds which may result in their death and would be a violation of federal law as well.

For more information or to contact the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, please go to www.fws.gov/pacific and click on the "contact us" link at the top of the page. Contact information for each state wildlife department as well as each U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service office per state can be accessed [here](#).